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Students Lived Experiences in Autonomous English Listening Learning Through Digital Media: A Narrative Inquiry

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abstrak— Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman hidup mahasiswa dalam pembelajaran listening bahasa Inggris secara mandiri melalui media digital. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan narrative inquiry, penelitian ini mendalami perjalanan pribadi lima mahasiswa sarjana ketika mereka beralih dari pembelajaran yang bergantung pada guru menuju praktik belajar mandiri berbasis digital. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis naratif tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya transformasi identitas yang signifikan pada para partisipan, dari awalnya mengalami kecemasan dan stres dalam listening di lingkungan kelas formal menjadi memiliki rasa percaya diri dan kebanggaan melalui pembelajaran mandiri. Para partisipan memanfaatkan berbagai platform digital, seperti YouTube, film, dan Spotify, serta mengembangkan strategi bertahan yang bersifat personal, termasuk pengulangan audio dan penggunaan subtitle, untuk mengatasi tantangan linguistik seperti kecepatan bicara penutur asli dan keberagaman aksen. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa media digital menyediakan ruang yang aman yang dapat mendorong kemandirian belajar dan kenyamanan emosional, yang sangat penting bagi perkembangan kemampuan bahasa dalam jangka panjang. Penelitian ini juga mengimplikasikan bahwa integrasi pembelajaran mandiri berbasis digital dapat menjadi alternatif yang efektif terhadap metode pembelajaran tradisional yang berpusat pada guru.

Kata kunci— Pembelajaran Mandiri, Media Digital, Kemampuan Mendengarkan Bahasa Inggris, Pengalaman Langsung, Naratif Inquiry

Abstract— This study explores students lived experiences in autonomous English listening learning through digital media. Using a narrative inquiry approach, the research delves into the personal journeys of five undergraduate students as they transitioned from teacher-dependent learning to autonomous digital practice. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. The findings reveal a significant identity transformation among participants, moving from initial listening anxiety and stress in formal classroom settings to a sense of self-efficacy and pride through self-directed learning. Participants utilized various digital platforms, such as YouTube, film and Spotify, and developed personalized survival strategies, including audio repetition and subtitle usage, to overcome linguistic challenges like native speakers' speed and diverse accents. The study concludes that digital media provides a safe space that fosters learner autonomy and emotional comfort, which are crucial for long-term language proficiency. This research implies that integrating digital-based autonomous learning can be a powerful alternative to traditional teacher-centered methods.

Keywords— Autonomous Learning, Digital Media, English Listening, Lived Experience, Narrative Inquiry

INTRODUCTION

In English language learning, listening plays an important role because it allows learners to understand spoken communication and participate in meaningful interaction. It serves as the foundation for effective communication and contributes significantly to students' academic success and overall engagement with the target language (Nugroho, 2024). Despite its importance, listening has often been treated as a passive skill in formal classroom settings, where materials are curated by teachers and practice time is limited. In some classroom situations, students may also show low motivation during listening activities when the media used is considered less engaging (Rozak, 2023). As a result, the increasing use of digital technology has changed the way students practice listening today (Prastiwi & Tirtanawati, 2019). Today, students can access a vast range of authentic English content through platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, podcasts, and social media, allowing them to practice listening anytime and anywhere (Haleem et al., 2022). As a result, many students now practice listening more independently outside the classroom.

However, the use of digital media for language learning also presents several challenges. Students who try to learn listening independently often struggle with the natural speed of native speakers, unfamiliar accents, and informal language use that differs from the structured input they receive in academic settings. Besides linguistic difficulties, some students also face problems related to internet access and limited digital facilities, especially in certain areas in Indonesia (Al-farizi & Suherman, 2019). Furthermore, independent learning through digital platforms requires students to manage their own learning, although these skills are not always developed in formal education.

A review of previous research reveals that studies on digital media and listening skills have largely focused on measurable outcomes, such as test scores, vocabulary gains, or general learning performance (Alwehaibi, 2015; Dewi, 2022). Although previous studies show that digital media can improve listening skills, they rarely discuss students' personal experiences during independent listening learning.

The few qualitative studies that do exist, such as Dewi (2022) on students' perceptions of online extensive listening and Susilowati (2020) on the challenges of online listening classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, offer more contextual understanding but still fall short in exploring how students personally construct meaning from their independent listening experiences. This gap suggests a need for research that centers students' voices and stories rather than measuring their performance against external benchmarks.

Therefore, this study uses a narrative inquiry approach that focuses on students' personal stories and lived experiences in autonomous listening learning. Instead of focusing only on learning outcomes, this study explores how students experience and interpret their independent listening activities through digital media. Specifically, the study is guided by two research questions: (1) How do students describe their lived experiences of using digital media to develop their English listening skills? (2) How do students interpret and make meaning from their learning experiences, including the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and the progress they perceive? By exploring these questions, this study aims to provide a richer and more student-centered understanding of autonomous digital listening practice that can inform teaching, curriculum design, and future research in EFL contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry was chosen because it focuses on understanding individuals' experiences through their personal stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, as cited in Cowger et al., 2021). This approach is suitable for the present study because it allows the researcher to explore how students experience autonomous English listening learning through digital media and how they interpret those experiences in their daily learning activities.

Through narrative inquiry, the researcher was able to examine students' personal learning journeys, including their challenges, learning strategies,

motivations, and perceived development over time. By focusing on participants' stories and reflections, this approach provides a deeper understanding of the emotional and personal aspects of autonomous listening learning that may not be fully captured through quantitative methods.

Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in the English Language Education study program at a private teacher training college in Bojonegoro Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The participants consisted of five undergraduate students selected through purposive sampling. The participants were chosen based on several criteria: they regularly practiced English listening independently through digital media outside the classroom, used digital platforms consistently for listening activities, and were willing to share their learning experiences during the research process.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Participant	Gender	Semester	Duration
P1	Female	8th	7 years
P2	Female	6th	13 years
P3	Male	8th	13 years
P4	Female	8th	7 years
P5	Male	8th	7 years

Table 1 presents the participants' profiles. The participants consisted of three female and two male students from the sixth to eighth semesters. All participants reported intermediate English proficiency and had different lengths of experience using digital media for listening practice, ranging from seven to thirteen years. To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms in the form of Participant 1 (P1) to Participant 5 (P5) were used throughout the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected primarily through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Each interview was conducted individually in a flexible one-on-one setting and lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-

recorded. The interview questions focused on students' learning motivations, listening strategies, challenges, emotional experiences, perceived progress, and personal reflections on autonomous listening learning through digital media. All interviews were conducted by the researcher between February 25 and February 27, 2026.

To support the interview data, the researcher also used brief participant reflections and field notes during the interview process. These notes included participants' emotional responses and other contextual details that helped provide a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The interview data were analyzed through transcription, repeated reading, coding, categorization, and theme development. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed several times along with field notes and participant reflections to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. Important experiences, emotions, challenges, and learning strategies were identified during the coding process and then grouped into broader themes based on the research questions.

To ensure trustworthiness, member checking and triangulation were applied. Participants reviewed the interview interpretations to confirm the accuracy of the findings, while interview data, participant reflections, and field notes were compared to identify consistent meanings. Ethical considerations were also addressed by ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, participant anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of participants' narratives revealed three major themes related to students' autonomous English listening learning through digital media. These themes include: (1) digital media as a space for autonomous listening learning, (2) challenges and adaptive strategies in autonomous listening learning, and (3) listening development and identity transformation. These themes illustrate how participants experienced, interpreted, and constructed meaning from their independent listening practices through digital media.

Digital Media as a Space for Autonomous Listening Learning

Participants' narratives showed that digital media played an important role in supporting their autonomous listening learning. Their motivation to practice listening independently came from different backgrounds. Some participants were motivated by personal interests and enjoyment, while others were influenced by academic or future career demands. These findings support Holec's (1981, as cited in Yun & Chong, 2025) and Benson's (2011) view that motivation is closely related to the development of learner autonomy.

For some participants, listening practice began from activities they genuinely enjoyed. P1, for example, explained that her interest in English started from her interest in K-pop. Seeing her favorite idols speak English motivated her to learn the language independently.

"Awalannya sih karena suka K-pop ya... terus ada salah satu anggota K-pop yang bisa bahasa Inggris. Wah keren nih, aku juga mau belajar bahasa Inggris, gitu."
("At first, it was because I liked K-pop. Then there was a K-pop member who could speak English. I thought it was cool, so I also wanted to learn.")
(P1, February 25, 2026)

Similarly, P2 explained that listening to English songs gradually became part of her learning process because she already enjoyed music in her daily life. These experiences are consistent with Isnaini and Aminatun's (2021) findings that music-based content can increase students' motivation and interest in listening activities.

Other participants described more external motivations. P3 viewed English as important for future professional needs, while P4 and P5 began to practice listening more seriously because of academic demands in college. Although their initial motivations were different, all participants eventually developed independent listening habits through digital media.

YouTube and Spotify were the most frequently used platforms among participants. They preferred these platforms because they were easy to access and

provided content that matched their personal interests. Some participants watched K-pop videos, movies, podcasts, storytelling content, or listened to English songs regularly. This finding reflects Benson's (2011) argument that autonomous learners tend to choose learning materials based on their own preferences and goals.

Participants also emphasized that digital platforms gave them greater control over their listening practice. Unlike classroom listening activities, digital media allowed them to pause, replay, slow down, and repeat materials as many times as needed.

"Sering mendengarkan dan mengulang."

("I often listen and repeat the materials.")

(P1, February 25, 2026)

"Diulang-ulang terus."

("I keep repeating them over and over again.")

(P5, February 27, 2026)

This flexibility helped participants learn at their own pace and created a more comfortable learning environment. Several participants preferred studying alone because they felt more focused and less pressured compared to classroom situations.

"Biasanya menyendiri supaya lebih fokus."

("I usually stay alone so I can focus better.")

(P4, February 27, 2026)

These findings support Godwin-Jones's (2011) argument that digital learning environments encourage learner autonomy by allowing students to decide how, when, and under what conditions they learn. However, participants also admitted that learning independently required self-discipline. Without external pressure from teachers or classmates, maintaining consistency was sometimes difficult.

"Males, tapi harus semangat karena kalo enggak dipaksa ngga akan bisa."

("I feel lazy sometimes, but I have to stay motivated because if I do not push myself, I will never improve.")

(P5, February 27, 2026)

Overall, participants' experiences indicate that digital media functioned not only as a learning tool but also as a flexible learning space where students could develop independent learning habits, manage their own listening practice, and gradually build learner autonomy.

Challenges and Adaptive Strategies in Autonomous Listening Learning

Although digital media provided flexibility in learning, participants also experienced various challenges during their autonomous listening practice. These challenges were related to language comprehension, technical issues, and self-management. Previous research has shown that less engaging listening media may reduce students' motivation and participation during listening activities (Rozak, 2023). However, instead of giving up, participants gradually developed their own strategies to deal with these difficulties.

The most common challenge mentioned by participants was understanding native speakers' speech. Several participants explained that fast speaking speed and different accents made listening difficult, especially at the beginning of their learning process.

"Native yang bicaranya cepat."

("Native speakers speak too fast.")

(P2, February 26, 2026)

"Aksen yang berbeda."

("Different accents.")

(P1, February 25, 2026)

Some participants also struggled with limited vocabulary, slang expressions, and words with similar pronunciation. These difficulties are similar to common problems found in listening activities, such as fast speaking rate, unfamiliar

vocabulary, distraction, anxiety, and difficulty recognizing spoken words. Limited vocabulary knowledge may also make it difficult for learners to fully understand what native speakers are saying during listening activities. Such challenges often make listening comprehension more demanding for language learners (Rozak, 2023). These findings are in line with Gilakjani and Sabouri's (2016) explanation that authentic listening materials expose learners to natural language use, which can increase the difficulty of comprehension for language learners.

Besides linguistic difficulties, participants also faced technical and motivational challenges. P3 mentioned that unstable internet connections sometimes interrupted listening activities, while P2 explained that phone notifications often distracted her concentration during learning. In addition, several participants admitted that learning independently required strong self-discipline. Because they managed their own schedules, maintaining consistency was sometimes difficult.

"Kurang konsisten karena jadwal kita sendiri yang menentukan."

("I am not very consistent because we determine our own schedules.")

(P1, February 25, 2026)

Participants also explained that learning without direct guidance from teachers or mentors sometimes created confusion when they encountered difficult materials. These experiences show that autonomous learning is not only about freedom but also about the ability to manage learning responsibilities independently.

Despite these difficulties, all participants developed personal strategies to help them continue learning. Repeating audio or video materials became the most common strategy among participants. By replaying listening materials several times, participants gradually became more familiar with pronunciation, vocabulary, and speech patterns.

"Diulang-ulang terus."

("I keep repeating them over and over again.")

(P5, February 27, 2026)

Another commonly used strategy was using subtitles or song lyrics while listening. Participants explained that subtitles helped them understand unfamiliar words and follow conversations more easily.

“Kalau Spotify enak buat denger lagu sambil lihat lirik.”

(“Spotify is convenient for listening to songs while reading the lyrics.”)

(P2, February 26, 2026)

Some participants also adjusted their learning environments by studying alone in quieter places to improve concentration. Others tried to maintain motivation even when they felt frustrated or bored during the learning process.

“Awalnya frustrasi lama lama seru.”

(“At first I felt frustrated, but over time it became enjoyable.”)

(P2, February 26, 2026)

These findings indicate that participants did not passively experience difficulties but actively adapted to them through different learning strategies. Over time, the challenges they faced became part of the process of developing learner autonomy, self-discipline, and emotional resilience in autonomous listening learning through digital media.

Listening Development and Identity Transformation

Participants’ narratives showed clear development in their listening skills over time. Continuous exposure to English content through digital media gradually helped participants improve their comprehension, become more familiar with native speakers’ pronunciation, and reduce their dependence on subtitles or lyrics.

P1 explained that she used to rely heavily on song lyrics when listening to English music, but over time she became less dependent on them.

“Dulu musik lihat lirik sekarang tidak terlalu bergantung pada lirik.”

("In the past I needed to look at the lyrics while listening to music, but now I do not depend too much on them anymore.")

(P1, February 25, 2026)

Similarly, P4 estimated that she could now understand around 80% of English content on social media without subtitles. P2 also mentioned that native speakers' speech, which once sounded too fast and unclear, gradually became easier to understand. These findings support previous studies showing that continuous exposure to authentic listening materials can improve learners' listening comprehension over time (Dewi, 2022; Alwehaibi, 2015). In addition, learning through correction and feedback during the listening process may also help learners improve their comprehension and recognize their mistakes more effectively over time (Rahmawati & Tirtanawati, 2024).

One of the most interesting findings appeared in P3's narrative. He explained that English speech no longer needed to be translated consciously because the meaning automatically appeared in his mind while listening.

"Dulu pengucapan speaker atau native terdengar kurang jelas sekarang otomatis translate dalam otak."

("In the past, native speakers' pronunciation sounded unclear, but now my brain automatically translates it.")

(P3, February 26, 2026)

This experience indicates a significant shift in participants' listening ability and familiarity with English input. Through repeated exposure and continuous practice, listening became more natural and less mentally demanding for participants.

Beyond listening improvement, participants also experienced changes in confidence and self-perception. Several participants expressed pride in being able to learn independently and overcome challenges without relying heavily on teachers or other people.

"Bangga tanpa bantuan orang lain ternyata bisa."
("I feel proud that I can do it without other people's help.")
(P4, February 27, 2026)

Participants also viewed their listening practice as preparation for future real-life communication. P2 explained that learning English helped her feel more prepared and less anxious about communicating with foreigners in the future.

"Kita tidak tahu suatu saat akan ketemu orang luar... jadi enggak panik."
("We never know when we might meet foreigners someday, so at least we will not panic.")
(P2, February 26, 2026)

Interestingly, participants' experiences were not limited to language development alone. Some participants also became more aware of their own learning habits and self-management abilities during the process of autonomous learning.

"Kalau belajar sendiri itu jadi lebih ngerti cara ngatur diri sendiri juga."
("When learning independently, I become more aware of how to manage myself.")
(P2, February 26, 2026)

These findings suggest that autonomous listening learning through digital media influenced not only participants' listening abilities but also their confidence, independence, and self-awareness as learners. Digital media became more than simply a learning tool; it also became a space where participants gradually developed their identities as autonomous English learners.

CONCLUSION

This study explored students' lived experiences in autonomous English listening learning through digital media. The findings showed that digital platforms such as YouTube and Spotify helped participants practice listening more flexibly and independently based on their own interests, learning pace, and personal preferences.

Although participants faced various challenges such as fast speech, unfamiliar accents, limited vocabulary, and difficulties in maintaining consistency, they gradually developed their own learning strategies to overcome these problems.

The study also revealed that autonomous listening learning through digital media contributed not only to the improvement of listening comprehension but also to the development of confidence, self-discipline, and learner autonomy. Through continuous exposure and independent practice, participants became more aware of their own learning processes and more confident in managing their learning independently.

Overall, this study suggests that digital media can support autonomous listening learning by providing flexible learning opportunities and authentic language exposure. Therefore, teachers and educational institutions may consider encouraging students to engage more actively in independent digital listening practices as part of English language learning.

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